

## When Buying a New or Used Keyboard . . .

- Look for damage and neglect. Things like a cracked housing or damaged/sticky/missing keys and knobs are big red flags.
- Determine whether the keyboard is powered with an electrical plug, with batteries (how many batteries?), or both. **CHECK THE BATTERY COMPARTMENT FOR CORROSION.**
- Power the keyboard on and play all of the keys separately, and then several keys together, while adjusting the volume control.
- Make sure the various controls and sounds function properly, including the display screen (if it's equipped with one).
- Does the keyboard come with everything you'll need or want to be able to play? – see **REMEMBER THE EXTRAS** below.

## REMEMBER THE EXTRAS

When shopping for a keyboard, don't forget about the "extras", some that are nice to have and some that are essential to have.

- Most keyboards accept a specific **power adapter** (wall plug). New replacement adapters typically cost about \$20.
- A good quality **stand** provides a stable rest for your keyboard. The most common (and least expensive) are the single or double braced "X" stands. New double braced "X" stands and bench sets start at around \$60.
- A **sustain foot pedal** is essential to play certain piano pieces. New sustain pedals generally cost between \$15 and \$45. Most keyboards accept sustain pedals with a ¼" plug.
- If you'll be travelling with your keyboard, even occasionally, it's wise to invest in a good quality, padded "**gig bag**", or hardshell case, to protect your keyboard and to make it easier to carry. New padded bags run \$50 and up.



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# An informational guide about Keyboards and Digital Pianos

**FREE**  
Guide  
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MUSIC GEAR AND ACCESSORIES

Sometimes, terms like *Keyboard*, *Digital (or Electronic) Keyboard*, *Digital (or Electric) Piano*, and *DAW (digital audio workstation)* are used interchangeably, but they have some important distinctions.

## *Common Terminology*

**KEYBOARD** (or *Digital/Electronic Keyboard*) is a generic reference to any portable device laid out like a standard acoustic piano. Except for DAWs, most keyboards with less than 61 keys are often low-quality toys with very limited functions and sound options.

**DIGITAL PIANO** (or *Electric Piano*) is a keyboard designed to sound and feel more like a traditional acoustic piano. Generally found in 88, 76, and 61 key configurations, they offer a variety of sounds (voices), sound quality (sampling), and play (feel). Usually, more expensive digital pianos have more voices, better sound quality, and feel more like playing an acoustic piano.

**DAW** (*Digital Audio Workstation*) keyboards create and play music in MIDI (Musical Instrument Digital Interface) format. Often having less than 30 keys, playing a DAW feels nothing like playing an acoustic piano because they're primarily intended to be used with a computer rather than by themselves.

**VOICES** refers to the sounds keyboards produce. Grand piano, Jazz organ, Horn, Banjo, Cow bell, Violin are just a few examples of "voices". Some keyboards may have several hundred voices.

**WEIGHTED, GRADED, & VELOCITY SENSITIVE KEYS** describe how a keyboard feels and responds when played. Non-weighted keys have little or no resistance, while weighted keys mimic the natural resistance you feel when playing an acoustic piano. *Fully-weighted*, or *graded* keys, feel "heavier" in the lower notes compared to a lighter resistance when playing higher notes. Semi-weighted keys have a uniform resistance on *all* of the keys, giving you a feel that's close to that of an acoustic piano, but not quite. Another "key" feature is velocity (or touch) sensitive keys that respond to how hard or soft a key is played. The volume of a note increases when it's played with more force.

Nearly all keyboards with weighted keys are also velocity sensitive, but not all keyboards with velocity sensitive keys are weighted.

**SAMPLING** refers to the method of how voices (sounds) are recorded, or *sampled*, into a keyboard. Higher end (and even some entry-level) keyboards will have voices that have been faithfully sampled from actual acoustic instruments such as various piano models and different types of organs, as well as horns, stringed instruments, reed instruments, bells, drums, etc.

## *Things to consider*

Obviously, there's a lot to consider when choosing a keyboard. Here are some of the more important considerations:

### ***What do you want your keyboard to do?***

If you'll be using it for learning how to play the piano, you'll want a keyboard that feels like a piano, with fully-weighted (graded), or semi-weighted, keys at least. Another important piano feature is the capability to use a sustain pedal.

If you don't care about feel, quality, or options, an inexpensive keyboard may be just fine . . . at least for now.

### ***Where do you plan to use your keyboard?***

Are you going to keep it at home or "take it on the road" from time to time? If your keyboard will primarily be for home use, have a sturdy stand to set it on and a suitable bench for you to sit on. Also, make sure the keyboard has good sounding built-in speakers, and a headphone jack for private listening.

If you plan to take it with you, even occasionally, you'll need a portable stand and bench as well as a padded bag or hard case to protect your keyboard during travel. If playing outdoors or in a large room, you may need at least one powered speaker to amplify the sound of your keyboard.

### ***Do you want to be able to play many different sounds?***

Some keyboards have a large variety of sounds (voices) to choose from. These can include several types of pianos, organs, orchestral instruments, brass instruments, percussion sounds, etc. as well as multiple effects like chorus, reverb, and more. Of course, keyboards that sound better and have more voices, features, and options also cost more money.